**De-escalation Techniques**

The number of pupils with SEMH needs in school has increased. These pupils find school difficult, do not achieve and present with challenging behaviour that is difficult to manage. So, a different approach is needed to manage their behaviour in a way that keeps them, other pupils and the teacher emotionally safe.

De-escalation is an intervention for use with pupils who are becoming increasingly agitated with the aim of diffusing, re-directing or de-escalating a situation.

These techniques are most successful when used early, before the pupil loses control. Some of the early signs of agitation may include:

* Balled fists
* Fidgeting
* Shaking
* ‘Eye-balling’
* Head thrust forward
* Clenched jaw
* Rapid or high-pitched speech
* Pacing

These pupils need help calming down; don’t just turn your back in the hope they will calm by themselves.

---------------------------------

**Appear calm and self-assured**

Make sure you are not displaying the same signs of agitation that can be seen in the pupil: unclench your fists, do not hold eye contact and avoid standing square to the pupil.

**Maintain a neutral facial expression**

Even our eyebrows can indicate we are surprised or angry, and similarly our mouths can betray our emotions unwittingly. Another natural reaction we often have when under stress is to smirk or giggle, which must be controlled.

**Allow space**

Entering a person’s personal space can be useful to refocus on a task when the situation is calm, but when someone is agitated this can indicate aggression and escalate the situation. Staying some distance away will also help keep you safe should the pupil become physically aggressive.

**Control your breathing**

When we are stressed, angry or tense, our breathing becomes more shallow and rapid. If we take deeper, slower breaths, this will not only help keep us calm, but the pupil may begin to match our own breathing pattern. It can sometimes help to match the child’s breathing initially then gradually slow it down.

**Lower your voice and keep your tone even.**

It is hard to have an argument with someone who is not responding aggressively back to you.

**Distraction and diversion are extremely useful.**

When a pupil is aggressive, they are responding with their own fight-or-flight instincts and not thinking about their actions.

**Distract** them and engage their thinking brain, perhaps by changing the subject or commenting on something that is happening outside the window.

**Give choices**, repeat these using the broken-record technique if necessary, and do not get drawn into secondary behaviours such as arguing back, which are designed to distract or upset you.

**Acknowledging the pupil’s feelings** shows that you have listened to them and can be crucial when diffusing a situation; for example, ‘It must be really difficult for you ... thank you for letting me know’.

Take a walk and get a drink to encourage emotional regulation

**Use words and phrases** that de-escalate, such as:

* I wonder if...
* let’s try...
* it seems like...
* maybe we can...
* tell the pupil what you want them to do rather than what you do not want them to do; for example, ‘I want you to sit down’ rather than ‘stop arguing with me’.
* give the pupil take-up time following any direction and avoid backing them into a corner, either verbally or physically.
* Say, “I see your point”
* Say, “What can I do to make this better?”